

HOW TO... Brainstorm in Word

If you're suffering from writer's block, Rod Lawton knows how you can kick-start your creative muse. Here he explains how to say all the right things in the right order

There's nothing worse than staring at a blank sheet of paper, your fingers hovering, paralysed, two inches above your keys as your brain spins around in hopeless, unproductive circles. However, you're also in trouble if you find yourself bashing out 5,000 words only to realise you've gone off at a tangent because you didn't have a clear plan at the start.

Word's Outline mode can solve both these problems. Word isn't the only word processor to offer outlining tools, but we've yet to see it done better than this. In four simple steps, we can show you how to turn your raw ideas into a structured document that eventually almost writes itself.

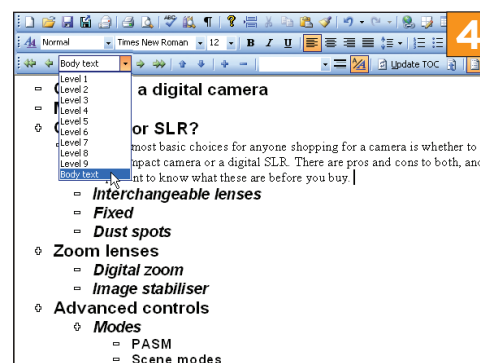
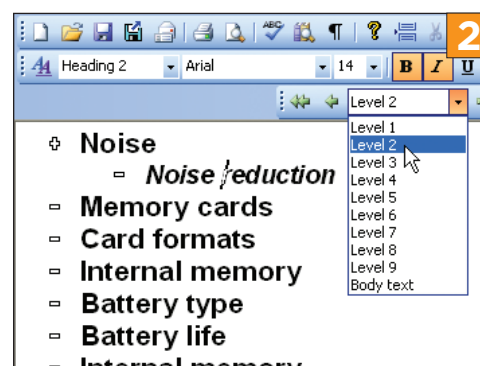
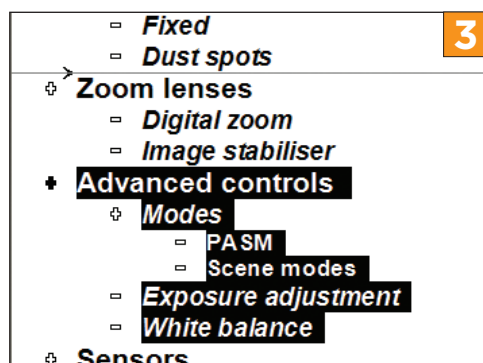
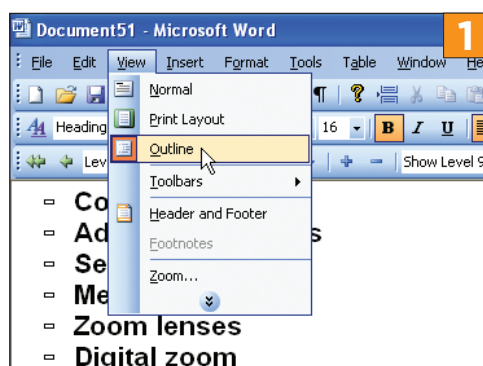
1 Imagine you have to write an article about choosing a digital camera. You may not know where to start, but when you use outlining it doesn't matter. You can approach the subject from any angle and sort out the structure later. First open a new blank Word document. Switch to Outline view via the View menu and start typing in words and phrases as they come to mind and in whatever order. Enter these like bullet points with a word or phrase per line. Stop when you've had enough, or when you think you're starting to repeat yourself.

2 On the top toolbar there's a drop-down menu showing the 'Level' assigned to each line in your

document. Because we have typed our text into a blank document in Outline view, it has all been entered at Level 1 in the outline. A section of text marked as Level 2 will appear as a subheading to the Level 1 text above it. In our example, we want to make Noise reduction a subsection of Noise. To do this, place the cursor anywhere within the text that's going to be changed into a subheading and select Level 2 from the drop-down menu.

3 You can change the hierarchy of a lot of headings by using keyboard short cuts. Press Tab to demote a heading and Shift-Tab to promote it. You can drag headings and their sub-headings up and down the hierarchy. To do this, click the symbol to the left of the heading. Now drag the whole lot up or down. A horizontal arrow shows you where it will be inserted when you release the mouse button.

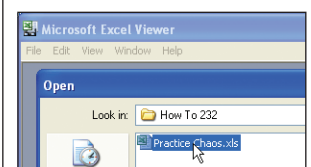
4 As you organise your document in this way, you'll notice that your outline fleshes itself out as you continue to work on it. At the end of the process, you'll have a set of headings that define the document's scope and structure and tell you exactly what you have to write and where it's supposed to go. To fill in the body copy itself, create a new blank line under a heading and select Body Text from the Levels drop-down menu. 



HOW TO... View Excel spreadsheets

If you don't have a copy of Excel, or you want to send information in an Excel spreadsheet to someone who doesn't, help is at hand. Go to www.microsoft.com/downloads and get a copy of Excel Viewer 2003. You'll find it under Most Popular Downloads. It will let you open, view and print Excel workbooks, but you won't be able to edit them. However, the contents of the workbook can be copied and transferred to another document.

The latest version of Office has new file formats. If a document is saved in these formats, you won't be able to open them in an older version of Office. There's also a compatibility pack available that will allow you to open these files, and you'll need to install this after you've installed the Viewer.



HOW TO... Take a short cut

The function keys, labelled F1 to F12, are useful for doing certain tasks quickly. In any program press F1 to see the Help menu. Press F12 in most programs for the Save As dialog box. In web browsers pressing F5 refreshes the page. In Word, use the F2 key instead of cut and paste. Highlight the text, press F2, click where you want the text to appear and press Enter.

You can assign your own tasks to a Function key in Word. Go to Tools, Macro, Record New Macro. Click Keyboard and enter the Function key you want to assign. To change from a function that might already be assigned, click Assign. Perform the task and stop the macro recorder. Now when you press that function key in Word, it will perform that task.

